

GOALS ARA takes on The Savage



By Jon Neely Team Goals ARA

One hundred and five teams! It's been quite some time since I entered a race that had anything approaching one hundred teams. Recently, it seems, forty teams is a large field and twenty something is the norm. This past weekend Team GOALS ARA (Bruce Wong, Kristen Dieffenbach and Myself) showed up at Hibernia Park in Eastern Pennsylvania for a GOALS ARA produced event: The Savage. Sure, this was a sprint race and we tend to do longer stuff which naturally have smaller sets of interested participants. But one hundred and five teams was an unbelievable number to be standing in the midst of before the starting gun.

Right from the starting gun it was clear the Race Directors (Bill and Anne Gibbons) had an excellent plan for handling the volume of racers in such a small area. Captains sprinted about 150 meters to pick up a PVC tube from a pile in the middle of a nearby field. Each tube was sealed with end caps and tied shut. In each tube there was a passport containing the order of sections for your team. The course was divided into four sections: Biking, Running, Canoeing and a Special Tests Section. The sections were randomized on the passports. So roughly 25% of the field started on each section. Better still, the order of checkpoints within each section was left up to the racers. Differing opinions on route split the field up even further. In three hours of racing we only reached a punch at the same time as another team once.

Our passport had Special Tests listed first. Personally, I haven't done anything like this in years. Remember the now defunct Hi-TEC/Balance Bar Sprint series? Where have you gone twelve-foot wall? Why have you abandoned me Crisco pit? I apologize for the moment of weepy nostalgia. There was nothing quite that elaborate here but some fun outdoor party games for children. For example: fill a vertical PVC pipe with water one cup at a time to retrieve a ping-pong ball within. By the way, the pipe has holes and you have to take turns being the person plugging the holes and running to get the water. Other tests involved balance beams, a cargo net crawl, hoisting a bag of sand and a lobster claw safety-line run.

We made quick work of the tests and moved on to the meat of the course. Biking was next for us. Off we went. Bruce and I have a tendency to navigate in tandem. However, Bruce had been to Hibernia Park before and as we set out he was just blowing through the turns on the way to our first CP. For anybody out there interested we selected B9-B5-B8-B7-B6-B4-B3-B1-B2 as our order. I quickly realized my best policy for helping navigate this section would be to get in the draft and shut up but not necessarily in that order. The big fun of the section was the whack across Brandywine Creek to cut the route from B6 to B4. Waist-deep water fun!

Orienteering was next. For anybody interested, our route selection this time was nearly in numerical order: O1-O2-O3-O4-O5-O6-O7-O9-O8. Now that we were on foot there was some opportunity for me to contribute on the navigation. I was able to straight line our routes a bit. I chose a direct route through the thorns to O3, a direct route through the poison ivy to O7 and a direct route through the thorns and poison ivy from O8 to the Finish. Is there a draft to shut up and get into while jogging? There was also a second opportunity to wade through Brandywine Creek in the same spot we had crossed with bikes. More waist-deep water fun! It felt awesome in the sunny, 70-degree weather.

Back at the central TA we prepped for our final section: the Canoe. According to the TA captain two other teams were out on their fourth section. No idea what they were doing but this was not bad! We ran to the put-in roughly a kilometer away from the TA. Our route selection ended up being C5-C4-C3-C2-C6-C1. When we looked at the maps we planned on visiting the buoy for C6 second. However, the buoy had blown down the lake or been misplaced a bit so we picked it up later rather than sooner. The canoe section had four points on water and two points off. For the off water points (C4 and C2) it was permissible to send a runner (or two) and leave teammates with the boat. We took this opportunity to use Bruce's speed on foot by dropping him as early as possible to run the road to C4. Meantime Kristen and I paddled the boat down the lake to pick him up as close to C3 as possible. Bruce and I doubled up on running to C2 as it seemed a bit more navigationally challenging. But it was located easily and we moved on.

Canoeing completed we charged back up the hill to the finish line. Third overall. First place coed. First and second had gone to a set of all male teams. The Hibernia Heroes took the overall and defended their home turf admirably. They had won by over ten minutes and put nearly twenty on us.

The missing category for the day was a family division of some sort. The Zech's and the Gung Ho Cycle Shop had an armada of teams entered including a team of 13-year old girls who finished! Close behind was a father and son team (son as in 10 years old). They came up a couple CPs short of an official sub 6-hour finish. But we saw the young man during the run section and were amazed at how fast he was charging down the trail. We hope to see him out there again.

I finished my last race report with a reference to bacon. In order to support equal time for the vegetarians out there: this is a picture of the thickest cheese sandwich ever. Yummy!